

FIELD STATION SPIRIT MOLECULE



JUNE 8 –
SEPT. 29, 2019

MSU BROAD

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

For this iteration of *Field Station*, artists Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Phillip Andrew Lewis explore new possibilities in gene editing and resurging interest in the medicinal use of psychotropic plants toward the creation of a genetic memorial. Collaborating with researchers in the MSU Departments of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, they sought to engineer human DNA into a plant that could be consumed as part of a final journey of intimacy with a lost loved one. The project has the potential to shift the dialogue around how we confront mortality and develop new cultural forms of mourning and communion. At its heart *Spirit Molecule* calls attention to the changing role of artists in society, the fruitful relationships that can be fostered between art and science, and our collective potential to alter cultural perspectives and beliefs through an investment in new and ancient forms of knowledge, alike.

Field Station: Spirit Molecule is organized by the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University and curated by Steven L. Bridges, Associate Curator. Support for this exhibition is provided by the MSU Federal Credit Union.

The museum and artists wish to express our gratitude to MSU associate professor Bjoern Hamberger, Aparajita Banerjee, Britta Hamberger, and Davis Mathieu for their dedicated support and guidance in the realization of this project. Thanks as well to Fathomers, a creative research institute focused on producing sites and encounters that challenge us to live and act differently in the world.

All photos: Eat Pomegranate Photography, unless otherwise noted.





Photos: Aaron Word/MSU Broad



EXHIBITION PRESS RELEASE

The MSU BROAD Announces the Participating Artists in its Yearlong Field Station Series,
Launching August 4, 2018

East Lansing, MI — The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad) announces the full list of participating artists in the second year of its *Field Station* series, an annual exhibition program designed to push the boundaries of artistic research and interdisciplinary production. *Field Station* invites six artists per year to embark on new projects specifically couched in the museum and university contexts, which fuel opportunities for collaboration and engagement at the MSU Broad across the many communities it serves. Various forms of educational programming accompany each exhibition to further explore crossdisciplinary approaches.

Featured artists in this year's *Field Station* include:

Scott Hocking: August 4–September 30, 2018

This year's cycle will commence on August 4 with an exhibition by Detroit-based artist Scott Hocking. By using and transforming frequently discarded elements of the urban landscape, Hocking's work poses urgent questions about our built environment and its relationship to the ancient histories of the lands on which it sits. For *Field Station*, Hocking will be making a site-specific installation with railroad ties that draws upon the many-layered history of Michigan, from forests and lumber, to ancient trails and railroads. The discarded ties, which can be found all over the state, are evidence of a once massive network of railroads that used to run through the state. As both connective tissue and disruptive force, the railroad shaped Michigan for generations, and its modern legacy is visible in many small towns, long since deserted by industry.

Matthew Angelo Harrison: October 13–November 25, 2018

Matthew Angelo Harrison will create a new body of sculptural works that further his exploration of what he has dubbed "abstracted ancestries," often encasing found African carvings in resin, altered through the use of machine technologies. New "prototypes" (as the artist refers to them) will move off of the artist's signature pedestal designs and onto the wall, accompanied by other sculptures in the round that simultaneously reference and disrupt the museological context.

Ken Grimes: December 8, 2018–February 3, 2019

Ken Grimes is well-known for his visual representations and textual diatribes that delineate the ways in which our perceived reality of the world is full of partial truths, and how technology and information can be used to obfuscate our understanding of the world in which we live. For the past 30 years, Grimes has been dedicated to creating a massive, singular body of work that derives from his discovery of a glitch in our constructed reality, which initiated his lifelong quest to come to terms with the influence and presence of "alien spirituality." The exhibition at the MSU Broad will feature new work by the highly prolific artist, alongside a number of past multipanel pieces that point to his unwavering conviction.

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Johanna Unzueta: February 16 – May 26, 2019

Through sculpture and installation, Johanna Unzueta addresses the notion of labor and its technological, historical, and social impact. Incorporating natural materials such as felt, fabric, and wood, often manipulated in labor-intensive configurations, her works are based on industrial architectures, tools, and machinery that are symbolic of progress, production, and human development. For her *Field Station* exhibition, Unzueta will produce a site-specific installation that speaks to the agricultural history of Michigan State University and the broader industrial context of the state of Michigan.

Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Philip Andrew Lewis: June 8 – September 29, 2019

The artists embark on a new project titled *Spirit Molecule*, which combines Dewey-Hagborg's practice of genetic hacking and Lewis' experience with psychoactive botany. *Spirit Molecule* centers on the propagation of a transgenic psychedelic plant that is engineered with the DNA of Rosalind Franklin, the X-ray crystallographer whose work made the discovery of the double helix form of DNA possible. Part of a longer process of investigation, this iteration of the project will be shaped through collaborations on the MSU campus, utilizing University expertise and resources to explore gender politics, scientific discovery, and emerging techniques in the manipulation of life.

The first *Field Station* cycle launched on April 29, 2017, in an effort to further the missions of both the MSU Broad and Michigan State University (MSU) of interdisciplinary research by connecting seemingly distinct disciplines in innovative ways. Past artists include Alicja Kwade, Daniel G. Baird, Duane Linklater, Kathryn Andrews, Michael E. Smith, and Claudia Peña Salinas. Each artist is given the opportunity to connect with the diverse resources of MSU, resulting in additional opportunities for research, workshops, community engagement, lectures, and class participation.

Carla Acevedo-Yates is Associate Curator at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. She is an international curator, researcher, and widely published writer working across the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Recently, she curated *David Lamelas: Fiction of a Production*, a major solo exhibition of the Argentinian pioneer of conceptual art, co-curated *Michigan Stories: Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw*, and curated solo exhibitions of artists Claudia Peña Salinas, Duane Linklater, and Jesús "Bubu" Negrón, and collection shows *Another Country* and *Hold, Control, Repeat*. She earned an M.A. in Curatorial Studies and Contemporary Art at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (Ramapo Curatorial Prize) and a B.A. in Spanish and Latin American Cultures from Barnard College, Columbia University (Clara Schiffrin Memorial Spanish Prize in Poetry). She is a recipient of a Creative Capital | Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for an article on Cuban painter Zilia Sánchez. She is the inaugural curator of Mekanismos, the special projects and performance section of Meca International Art Fair in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Steven L. Bridges is Associate Curator at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. Most recently, Bridges co-curated the major exhibitions *Michel Parmentier* and *Michigan Stories: Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw*. Other exhibitions include solo presentations by artists Michael E. Smith, Kathryn Andrews, and Daniel Baird; the collection shows *Andy Warhol: A Day in the Life* and *The Transported Collection*; and *Beyond Streaming: A Sound Mural for Flint*, a residency project for which artist Jan Tichy was invited to respond to the Flint water crisis. Previously, Bridges was the Curatorial Assistant at the MCA Chicago, where he curated solo exhibitions of the work of artists Faheem Majeed and Jason Lazarus. He also assisted the major retrospective exhibition of the work of Doris Salcedo, which traveled to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Pérez Art Museum Miami. From 2011–15, Bridges co-curated the annual Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival in Chicago. His essays and articles have been published in numerous journals and in exhibition catalogues and other online and print media. In 2017 he was named a curatorial fellow at the FACE Foundation.

VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

ATTENDANCE AND TOURS

Over the course of the exhibition, the MSU Broad was pleased to welcome 16,228 visitors. Of those, 936 participated in the MSU Broad's tour program, which includes K-12, university, and community tours, as well as docent-led public tours.

2019 SUMMER CAMPS

Throughout June, July, and August, Summer Art Camp participants ages 6-18 toured *Spirit Molecule* as part of an inquiry into ways artists use natural materials to communicate their ideas. Throughout each week, campers created their own artwork in response to this exhibition.



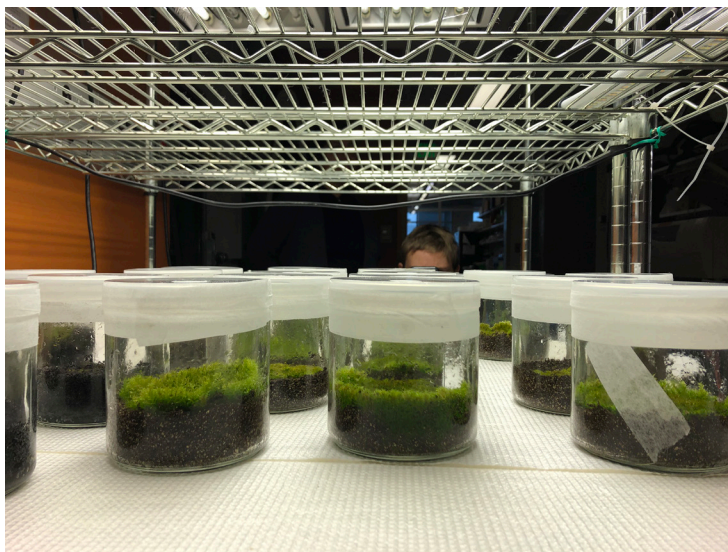
Photo: Aaron Word/MSU Broad

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NEXT STEPS

THE ARTISTS + THE SCIENTISTS

In light of the initial experimental successes with the project, the collaboration between Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Phillip Andrew Lewis, and the lab overseen by assistant professor Bjoern Hamberger continues on after the run of the exhibition. The artists and scientists remain in dialogue and new iterations of the experimental procedures and overall Spirit Molecule project continue to develop.



Photos: Aaron Word/MSU Broad

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DIGITAL MEDIA

Field Station: Spirit Molecule and related programming was featured in the MSU Broad's email newsletters and social media accounts leading up to and throughout the run of the exhibition, including a series of introductory video interviews with the artist.

The MSU Broad has **8,700** email subscribers, **8,400** Facebook followers, **4,400** Twitter followers, and **6,300** Instagram followers.



msubroad
Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU

msubroad Spirit Molecule calls attention to how new scientific advances and the changing role of artists in society have the potential to alter cultural perspectives and beliefs.



Liked by **msucal** and **162 others**



msubroad
Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU

msubroad A large mound of earth occupies the center of the gallery. Four beacons of white light shine upward from the mound. The gallery has become a grow lab that transports visitors to an otherworldly realm.



Liked by **benbrownfinearts** and **101 others**

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INTRODUCTORY TEXT

With this iteration of the *Field Station* series, Heather Dewey-Hagberg and Phillip Andrew Lewis explore new possibilities in gene editing toward the creation of a genetic memorial. Combining Dewey-Hagberg's practice of genetic hacking with Lewis's experience with psychoactive botany, they aspire to engineer human DNA into a plant, which could be consumed as part of a final journey of intimacy with a lost loved one. The project has the potential to shift the dialogue around how we confront death and develop new cultural forms of mourning and communion. Here, the artists and their collaborators attempt to cultivate the "spirit molecule."

How do we individually and collectively confront the legacies of our lives? How do we hope to be remembered? How are the ways we mourn and remember our loved ones culturally informed? And how might ancient knowledge around the medicinal use of plants and new scientific strategies answer some of these questions, and help us confront this taboo subject in order to better prepare for what lies ahead?

This highly experimental biological intervention is undertaken in collaboration with MSU assistant professor Bjoern Hamberger and his team in the Departments of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Part of a larger, ongoing effort by the artists, *Spirit Molecule* represents a major step forward in successfully inserting human DNA into the cells of a type of moss, *Physcomitrella patens*. For the opening of the exhibition, the team has produced four genetically modified moss plants engineered to express the scent of patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*), a plant often used in incense that evokes the aura of the 1960s psychedelic movement. Yet, the experiments continue in the lab and the exhibition will evolve over the course of its run.

While the moss *Physcomitrella patens* itself does not have psychoactive properties, the earthen landscape in the gallery includes a species of liverwort (*Radula perrottetii*) that produces the psychoactive compound perrottetinene, which is similar to THC. The presence of the liverwort as part of the setting for the transgenic moss points to the artists' vision to one day insert recombinant human DNA directly into a plant with psychoactive properties.

Spirit Molecule calls attention to how new scientific advances and the changing role of artists in society have the potential to alter cultural perspectives and beliefs. These evolutions are of course happening all the time, but they do not always register in the individual or collective psyche. With this work, Dewey-Hagberg and Lewis attempt to harness changing realities and direct them toward more humane and empathetic outcomes. With the support of MSU, the artists are able to advance, in ethical ways, the conversation around genetic engineering and the medicinal potential of psychoactive plants. The artists also tap into the spirit of research and collaboration that is a core value of the university-part of its own institutional DNA.

Field Station: Spirit Molecule is curated by Steven L. Bridges, Associate Curator.

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FIELD STATION is an annual cycle of projects that features work by artists at different moments in their careers. With a particular focus on new terrain, the series emphasizes the importance of research by offering a space for artists to develop ideas that may be in the early stages of conception or articulation. *Field Station* approaches art as a complex language that involves many forms and draws upon different disciplines, from engineering, physics, and agriculture to literature, history, and technology. The notion of a field station specifically points to the importance of experimentation and the idea of the museum as software—a flexible structure that is constantly expanding beyond its walls (the hardware), wherein artists are encouraged to collaborate across disciplines at Michigan State University.

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